

Awoke from the Dead in the New Orleans Morgue

**Mr. Robert Ames
Describes a Distressing
Real Life Experience
Which Novelists
and Dramatists Have
Often Tried to Imagine**

IN the morgue in New Orleans the day after the recent Gulf hurricane lay the battered body of Robert Ames, "dead." He was a chauffeur, from Chicago, and his crushed remains with the dead body of a companion had been taken from the ruins of a collapsed building. To the stupefied and momentary horror of the morgue attendants the body of Mr. Ames stirred, a groan escaped and the form on the slab had come to life! Mr. Ames describes his extraordinary experience below.

By Robert Ames.

Statement Made by Mr. Ames in the Hospital.

I WAS killed in the great New Orleans hurricane, September 29. My body was taken to the morgue and the next morning had been prepared for burial in Potter's Field. I came to life a little before noon of September 30. I am in a hospital now with five ribs broken, one of them caved in against my heart; my head bruised and lacerated; and more than sixty abrasions on various parts of my body, arms and legs—but I am very much alive and the plain wooden coffin which had been brought to the morgue for my use is now occupied by some other poor devil.

I was walking in South Rampart street, New Orleans, on the twenty-ninth of September about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The wind was blowing at a rate of nearly 100 miles an hour—I learned this from the official figures, afterward. Glass and slate and bricks were flying all about my head. I could scarcely stand on my feet. I sighted Moore's veterinary hospital through the darkness which had settled down and I rushed in. Inside was another man. We huddled together in the front of the building, which was constructed of brick.

Suddenly a big slice of the roof was lifted off by the hurricane. I attempted to rush out into the street, but the whole building came down on me and my companion. I learned later that I lay covered by debris and wreckage until nearly midnight, when a police squad of rescuers took my body and the other man's and sent them to the morgue.

It appears, therefore, that I died between five and six o'clock that afternoon.

In my death, or trance, or whatever it was, I believed that I had died. I recalled the crash of the falling building. It seemed to me that I was in an endless valley with billions of persons trudging on to an endless, vague destination. It was not anything like the orthodox idea of heaven about which I had read. Nor did it suggest hell. I suppose it was nearer to the accepted idea of purgatory.

I was a little perplexed—the perplexity which would be natural to any one who was to find himself in the midst of billions of persons, tramping, trudging, but with no idea of the goal.

I saw only men and women. There were no children—no boys or girls or babies.

"Where are the children?" I asked a fellow pilgrim who walked by my side.

"There are no children now," he replied. "We are all grown. When I died I was an infant."

"Died!" I exclaimed to myself. "So I am dead—that accounts for all this, and all these people here are dead people." I remember thinking. It was my first realization of the situation.

But everything seemed natural enough. The strange discovery my companion had revealed, that a child immediately becomes a grown up person when it dies, did not seem to astonish me. And when, soon after, I saw two of my cousins who died when they were children and found they were grown women I was not surprised.

To be among the dead seemed to me not at all surprising.

I remember the curious pallor of all the faces around me which seemed quite as it should be. I had no sensations of pain—no emotions. I was not hungry, I was not thirsty. I was not sleepy nor especially interested in where I was going.

I was not in any hurry, and yet I felt impelled to go on and on with the throng which was moving along. One strange thing impressed me—there was no noise. Countless thousands of shuffling feet and yet not a sound; voices I heard, and yet without sound. I heard what was being said, but the words came to me as noiselessly as the words on a moving picture screen.

I was not in the world of the living. This much I was well aware of. I was entirely out of touch with all living things. I could not see the sunlight of the world, I did not feel the pressing weight of the boards and beams that held me crushed under their mass, the policemen and firemen who shouted and worked about me I neither saw nor heard.

I was dead, and among the dead.

But suddenly all this changed. I became conscious of the world of the living—I could see and hear faintly.

Then I felt cold. I felt ice water trickling on my sides. I was nude and lying on a marble slab. I tried to make an outcry, a moan, but could not. I could not open my eyes or stir a muscle.

"Killed in the storm last night," said a voice near me, "he and one of the negroes. The other one's from the hospital. Consumption."

Two men lifted my body from the slab and let the hydrant run on me. Of course my heart must have been beating then, but I am sure my chest did not rise and fall to the impulse of the respiration. Later I was told that when I was taken from the ruins of the veterinary hospital a physician had declared

"I carefully, deliberately moaned, at the same time exerted an effort, which resulted in my being able to move my arm, which was covered with a sheet. . . . The terrified morgue attendants and the driver who had brought in the caskets fled!"

that the rigidity of my body showed I had been dead four or five hours.

If I had been wealthy and the address of my relatives had been known I suppose they would have proceeded to embalm me.

Probably the cold water which had been allowed to trickle over me to "keep" my body prevented my thawing out when the blood began to circulate. I was mentally conscious, but my body was stiff as a board.

"His whole side is caved in," remarked one of the attendants as he swished me with soap and water. I felt no pain.

"That nigger's neck is broke," said the other, indicating one of my companions on the slab.

"Who's the white stiff?" asked a curiosity-seeker, who sauntered into the morgue.

"He's Robert Ames, a Chicago chauffeur," replied the attendant, who evidently had gone through my belongings to make an official identification. "That's all we know. We can't keep the body during stormy days like these. As soon as we get the coffins we'll send him and the two niggers to Potter's Field."

I was replaced on the slab. My clothes were put back on my body and a sheet was drawn over me.

A little later the family of one of the negroes arrived, and, after identifying their dead, took his body away. The colored man and I were left on the slab. I knew he was next to me as his body was put back after it, too, had been prepared for burial.

Then I dozed.

Again I passed on into the world of the dead. Again I was trudging on with that endless, noiseless throng.

I don't know how long it was before I awoke. I heard a noise of a box being dragged along the stone floor.

"The short one's for the white man," directed one of the attendants. "Put it near his body."

I knew they were bringing in my coffin. I clutched with my hands; I exerted all the strength of my heart and very soul to move my muscles. I filled my lungs and attempted to shout—to shout in such a fashion as would be heard a mile away. And from my feeble body, thanks to God, came forth a groan.

One of the men dropped his end of a coffin and leaped back.

"What was that?" he asked.

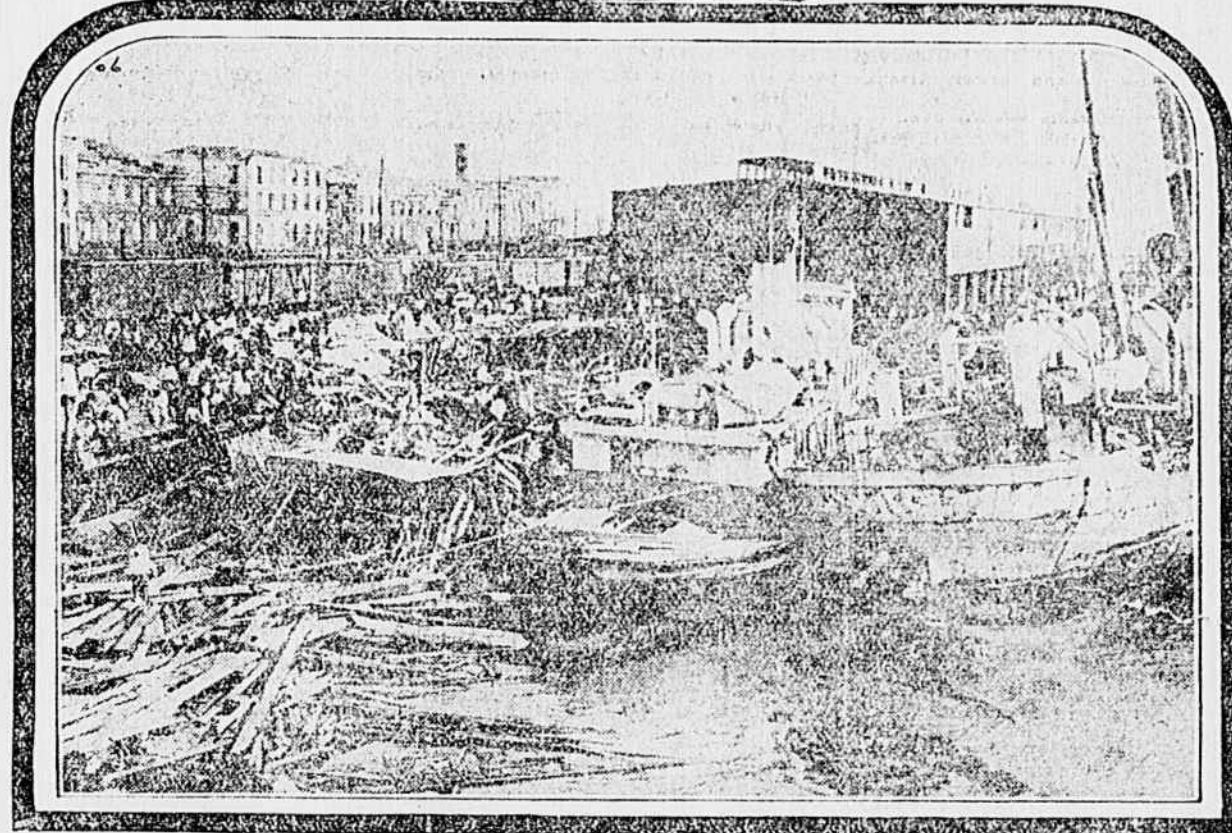
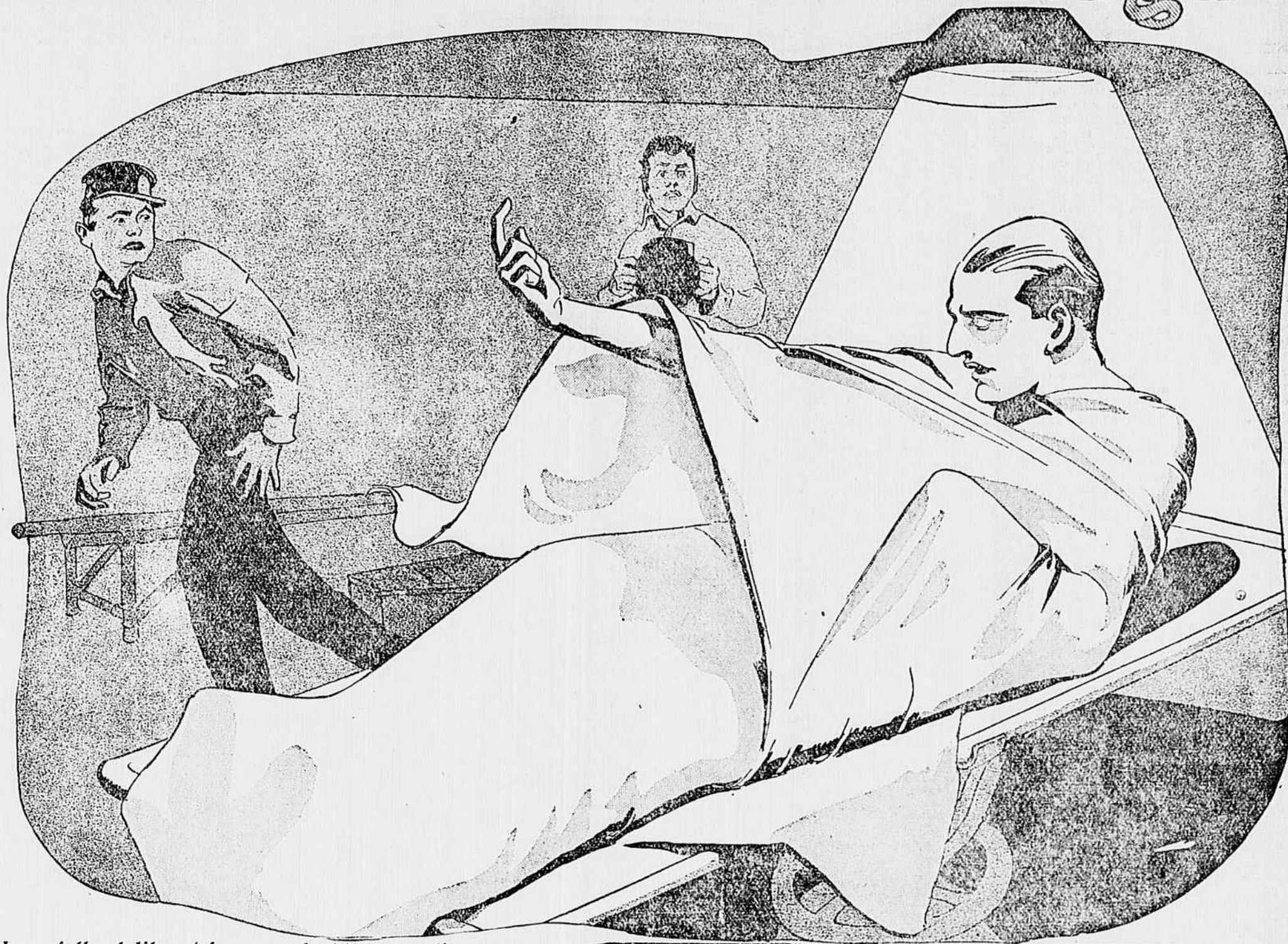
"Nothing," replied an attendant at the other end of the morgue. "May have been a kid in the lot outside."

I felt a little self-assurance then. I felt as if my trance or whatever mysterious transition it was, had passed. I carefully, deliberately moaned, at the same time exerting an effort which resulted in my being able to move my arm, which was covered with a sheet. I was both seen and heard. The terrified attendants and the driver who had brought in the caskets fled. I was left alone with the dead negro, but only for a moment, as the alarm had been sounded and a dozen men came back with those who had run away.

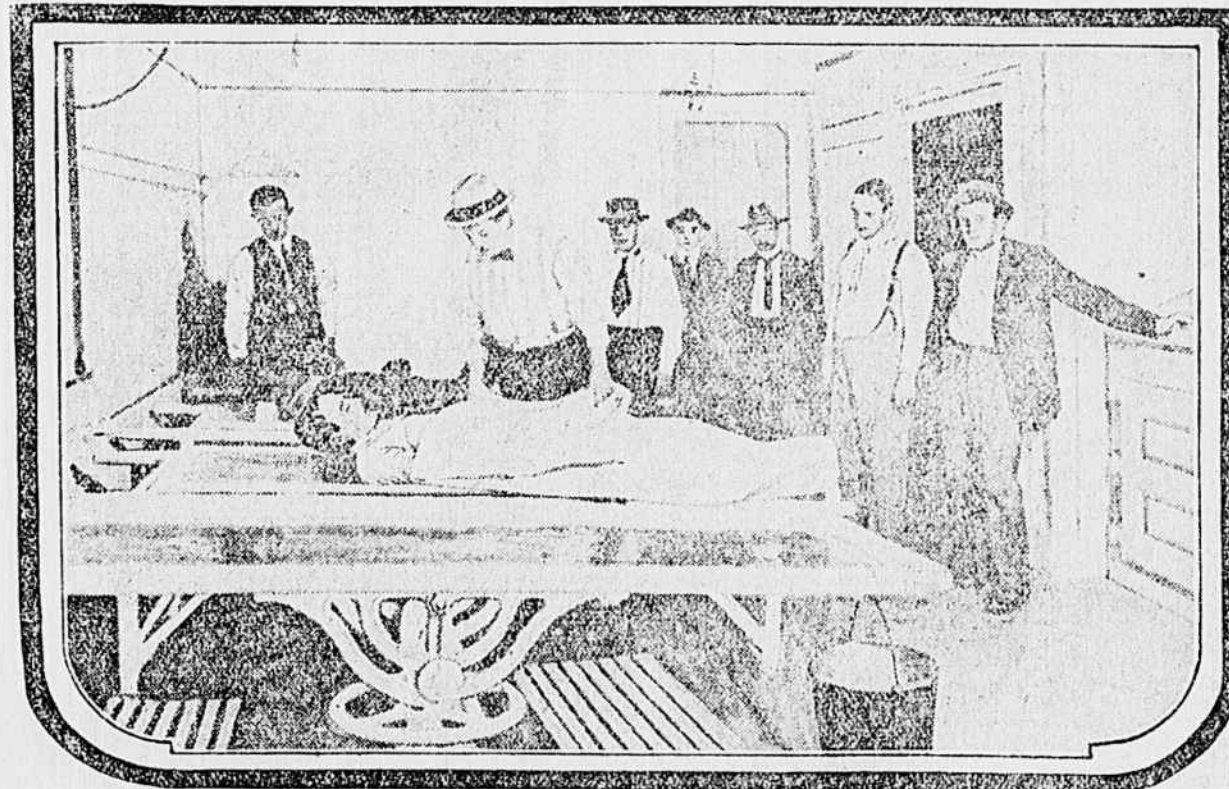
My eyes were opened by this time.

"I'm not a ghost," I gasped. "Don't get scared. Bring me something hot."

In a jiffy a stretcher had been fetched and I was tenderly lifted from the slab and taken from the house of death into the coroner's office. An ambulance arrived, and I was taken to a public hospital. I was given stimulants. An hour or so later a surgeon examined me and said an operation was necessary. I was in no mood for this. I was dressed and at the first opportunity I fled the hospital. No operation for me. I went to a private institution and they tell me I will recover without the use of a knife.



Photograph Showing Some of the Ruin and Wreck of the New Orleans Hurricane.
Photo by International Film Service.



Photograph Taken Inside the New Orleans Morgue. On One of These Slabs Mr. Robert Ames
"Came to Life."